

# **Delivering Customer Service via the Contact Center and the Web**

Covering All Points of Attack

September 2009

Sumair Dutta

## Executive Summary

Customer service delivery is no longer limited to the realms of the contact center or to the outreach of field service. As the availability of product and service information on the Internet grows and communications platforms proliferate, both the providers and receivers of service have larger networks through which to communicate, interact and transact. For the providers of service, a mastery of service information available to all stakeholders, whether internal or external, on all delivery channels and platforms, can greatly influence the efficiency with which customer requests for service are met, ultimately resulting in higher service margins (24% for Best-in-Class versus 13% for all others) coupled with significantly higher levels of customer satisfaction.

### Best-in-Class Performance

---

In September 2009, Aberdeen Group surveyed over 190 service professionals to distinguish Best-in-Class companies from Industry Average and Laggard. Those defined as Best-in-Class exhibited the following:

- 75% current performance in first-call resolution
- 4.3 (out of 5.0 possible) score for current level of customer satisfaction
- 21% reduction in total support costs over the last 12 months

### Competitive Maturity Assessment

---

Survey results show that the firms enjoying Best-in-Class performance are:

- More than two-times as likely as all others to leverage service management systems with contact center functionality and nearly two-times as likely to invest in knowledge management and self-service solutions
- Nearly two-times as likely to equip their technicians with standard escalation protocols and to invest in frequent training programs
- Three-times as likely as all others to provide customers with issue resolution scenarios and multiple avenues for self-service

### Required Actions

---

To achieve Best-in-Class performance, companies must:

- Empower stakeholders with real-time access to information
- Integrate all service departments under the leadership of a service executive
- Educate customers on availability of non-contact center-based support channels
- Consider the revenue implications of improved customer management

### Research Benchmark

Aberdeen's Research Benchmarks provide an in-depth and comprehensive look into process, procedure, methodologies, and technologies with best practice identification and actionable recommendations

"The impact of implementing our self-service solution on our brand sites was instant. Consumers have reported that they feel like they're chatting with a live agent. And what resonates most with them is the speed and accuracy of responses. They are getting exactly what they need online – exactly when they need it. This is at the center of our approach to delivering world-class service."

~ Linnea Johnson,  
Director of Consumer  
Services, Unilever

## Table of Contents

---

Executive Summary.....	2
Best-in-Class Performance.....	2
Competitive Maturity Assessment.....	2
Required Actions.....	2
Chapter One: Benchmarking the Best-in-Class.....	5
Making Contact.....	5
The Maturity Class Framework.....	9
The Best-in-Class PACE Model.....	11
Best-in-Class Strategies.....	11
Chapter Two: Benchmarking Requirements for Success.....	13
Competitive Assessment.....	14
Capabilities and Enablers.....	16
Chapter Three: Required Actions.....	25
Laggard Steps to Success.....	25
Industry Average Steps to Success.....	26
Best-in-Class Steps to Success.....	27
Appendix A: Research Methodology.....	29
Appendix B: Related Aberdeen Research.....	31

## Figures

---

Figure 1: Market Pressures for Improved Customer Service via Contact Center or Other Web-Based Support Channels.....	6
Figure 2: Impact of Effective Customer Request Handling.....	7
Figure 3: Means to Reduce Service Costs.....	8
Figure 4: Primary Reasons for Unnecessary Field Dispatches.....	9
Figure 5: Strategic Actions to Improve Customer Service Management in Contact Center and Other Support Channels.....	12
Figure 6: Use of Messaging to Relay Information Regarding.....	21
Figure 7: Solution Selection Framework.....	22

## Tables

---

Table 1: Reliance on Multiple Service Delivery Channels.....	5
Table 2: Top Performers Earn Best-in-Class Status.....	10
Table 3: The Best-in-Class PACE Framework.....	11
Table 4: The Competitive Framework.....	15
Table 5: Capabilities in Demand on the Phone.....	17
Table 6: Capabilities in Demand for Service Customers.....	18
Table 7: Solutions in Place.....	20
Table 8: Capturing the Returns.....	23
Table 9: Impact of the 5Es.....	24

Table 10: The PACE Framework Key .....30  
Table 11: The Competitive Framework Key .....30  
Table 12: The Relationship Between PACE and the Competitive Framework .30

## Chapter One: Benchmarking the Best-in-Class

### Making Contact

It is often said that the best service is no service, indicating that in a perfect world products wouldn't break and hence there would be no need for service-related interruptions. This might be true in the narrow scope of break / fix product service, but from an overall service point of view zero service interruptions would in fact require exemplary service from the overall service organization in the form of preventive or predictive maintenance. In that sense, while the asset operator might not be inconvenienced by service-related interruptions or even constant contact with the service organization, his / her reliance on service would in fact be higher.

In a not so perfect world, and in the broader context of customer service, contact with the service organization is necessary for a wide variety of issues - ranging from technical support, troubleshooting, billing updates and technician visits. Traditionally most of this contact was made via the phone through requests to the servicing organization's contact center. However, with the wide use of the internet and the platforms afforded by the world wide web, the customer ultimately has the choice of a wide variety of portals to not only initiate contact but also engage in a customer service transaction with one or many servicing organizations. In a recent survey conducted by the Aberdeen Group, it was found that while a majority of customer service requests still originate via the contact center, customers are taking advantage of other channels such as email, chat, and website self-service (Table I).

#### Fast Facts

- √ **52%** of service requests originate in the contact center, with 17% originating via email
- √ **75%** first-call resolution rates indicated by Best-in-Class organizations as compared to a 60% rate for all others
- √ **21%** reduction in support costs reported by Best-in-Class organizations over the last 12 months, compared to a 2% reduction for all others
- √ **34%** of all customer service issues could have been resolved by a cheaper (and available) service delivery channel

**Table I: Reliance on Multiple Service Delivery Channels**

Channel	Percentage of Requests by Origin (Average for All Respondents)		
	2008	Current	2010 Estimate
Contact Center	55%	52%	44%
Email	18%	17%	15%
Website Self-Service	12%	14%	18%
Website Query	11%	11%	12%
Chat/IM	2%	3%	5%
SMS	1%	1%	3%
Social Media	1%	2%	3%

Source: Aberdeen Group, September 2009

"Our program goal is to shift approximately 50% of inbound contact center calls to the web over the next 18 months. This means that for any call which is started on any channel, there is a way to save it in an incomplete or invalid state, and have its state picked up by an online chat agent or contact center agent, at the request of the user."

~ Director,  
 Mid-Size North American  
 Telecommunication Services  
 Organization

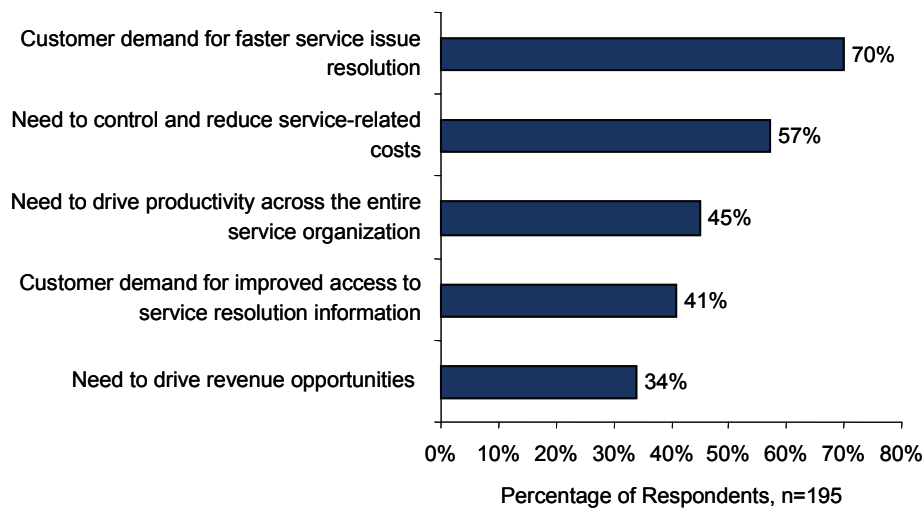
The reduction in the overall proportion of requests originating via the contact center (between 2008 and estimates for 2010) doesn't necessarily signal a reduction in the importance of the contact center. Rather, it illustrates the increasing availability of other options available to today's customers. The gradual uptick in usage of most non-contact center based media indicates the gradual increase in awareness amongst consumers as well as a gradual increase in the use of these various channels by the servicing organizations. From a volume point of view, survey respondents still indicate that they process nearly 700,000 annual requests via the contact center with another 300,000 requests via non contact-center related channels. The reason why these proportions don't match up with those shown in Table I is that respondents also indicate that 35% of requests made through non-contact center channels ultimately require escalation to the contact center.

"We actually expect the contact center to shift to incorporate web-based channels, and if we can reduce the footprint of our contact center we will, but it may end up just reallocating skill sets globally to take advantage of other channels."

~ Business Leader,  
Large North American PC  
Manufacturer

For the servicing organization, the proliferation of service channels is both a blessing and a burden. With pressure on these organizations to meet customer demands for faster, quicker service coupled with rising service-related costs (Figure I), the availability of multiple channels affords the servicing organization with numerous avenues to expand the reach of service information and updates while injecting efficiency in the delivery of service.

**Figure I: Market Pressures for Improved Customer Service via Contact Center or Other Web-Based Support Channels**



Note: respondents chose top three pressures  
Source: Aberdeen Group, September 2009

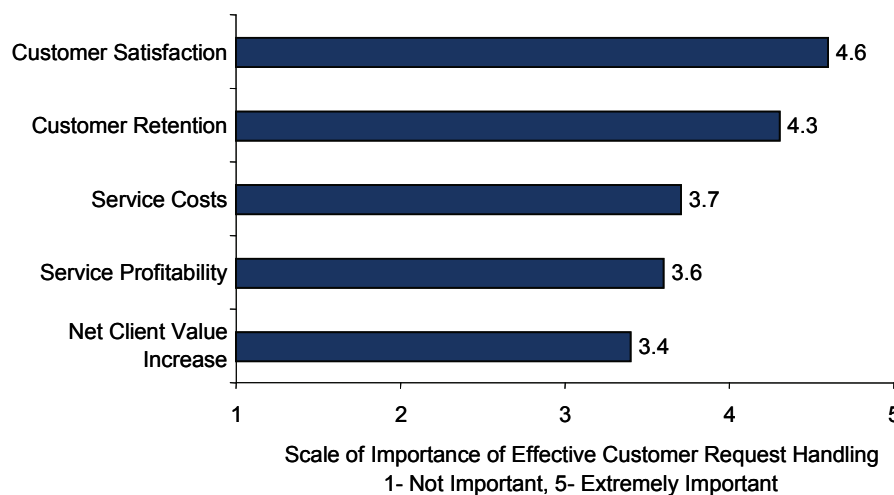
Customer requests can be segmented and directed to appropriate channels thereby enabling faster access to information along with a lower burden on more expensive service-based resources. For example, with access to numerous service delivery and customer contact channels, connections that were initially made via the contact center and could have resulted in an

unnecessary dispatch can now be rerouted to web-based self-service channels that require very little use of limited contact center and field-based resources. With an established hierarchy of service delivery channels, it isn't only the customers who can approach the servicing organization from numerous angles, but also the servicing organization that can enable customer service delivery via the most efficient channel.

However, the existence of a multi-channel support network also increases the responsibility on the servicing organization to ensure the accuracy and validity of information that is disseminated through each and every one of these channels.

Regardless, service organizations surveyed for this research place extreme importance on the efficient handling and resolution of customer service requests via the contact center and other non-field based channels. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being 'not important' and 5 being 'extremely important', respondents to Aberdeen's September 2009 survey indicated a result of 4.6 with regards to the vitality of effective customer request handling on customer service, with a 4.3 score on the importance to customer retention (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Impact of Effective Customer Request Handling**



Source: Aberdeen Group, September 2009

"Customer satisfaction is a moving target. As the customer expectations change the service and technology used to provide the service will change. In implementing the technology we believe that the customer has the choice of what technology he / she prefers to use, so our support systems must address the customers technology of choice."

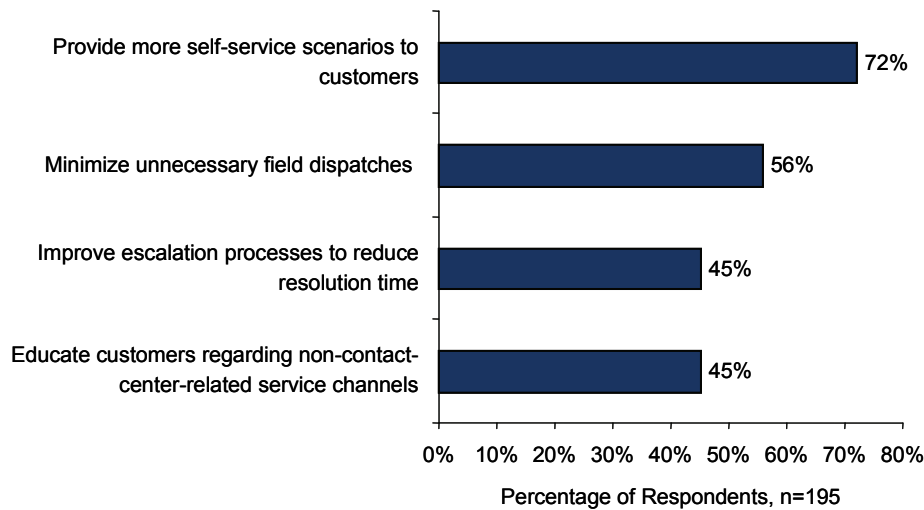
~ Don McNair,  
Senior Director - Customer  
Interaction,  
Yaskawa Electric North  
America

Responding organizations are also beginning to identify the impact of effective customer request handling on financial metrics such as service costs, revenues and the trickle down to profitability. Of note is the level of importance placed on Net Client Value Increase (NCVI) which measures the average increase in customer spend year over year. While not at the top of the list in the scale described above, Best-in-Class firms place significantly more importance (with regards to this scale) on the impact of effective customer request handling and service delivery on NCVI when compared to all other firms (3.9 for Best-in-Class versus 3.3 for all other firms). This focus on increasing customer spend and essentially driving

increased revenues, both product and service-specific, has been a key trend revealed in all of Aberdeen's 2009 service management research with regards to the intentions of Best-in-Class organizations.

While revenue pressures are also beginning to impact all organizations, they are secondary to the customer and cost management pressures revealed in Figure 1. From a cost management perspective, responding firms reveal that more than a third (34%) of all customer service requests over the last 12 months could have been (and should have been) resolved by a cheaper service delivery channel, i.e. call center as opposed to field service, email as opposed to call center and so on. In an attempt to eliminate service-related costs, a majority of respondents indicated the need to develop a multi-channel support structure so as to reroute unnecessary field dispatches to more manageable web-based self-service channels (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Means to Reduce Service Costs**



Note: respondents chose "all applicable"  
Source: Aberdeen Group, September 2009

Nearly one-half of all respondents also indicated the need to improve escalation processes so as to reduce the overall time to service issue resolution. Essentially, the longer a customer stays in the service cycle, the higher the value of resources that have to be utilized to support the customer's needs. Not to mention the negative service image associated with significantly extended resolution times. Forty-five percent (45%) of all respondents also indicate the need to dedicate marketing dollars towards raising awareness to the availability and efficacy of non contact center-related support channels. The mere existence of these channels doesn't guarantee their usage, thereby necessitating education campaigns around the information available and the types of service issues that can easily be resolved without the 'hold times' associated with contact-center based resolution.

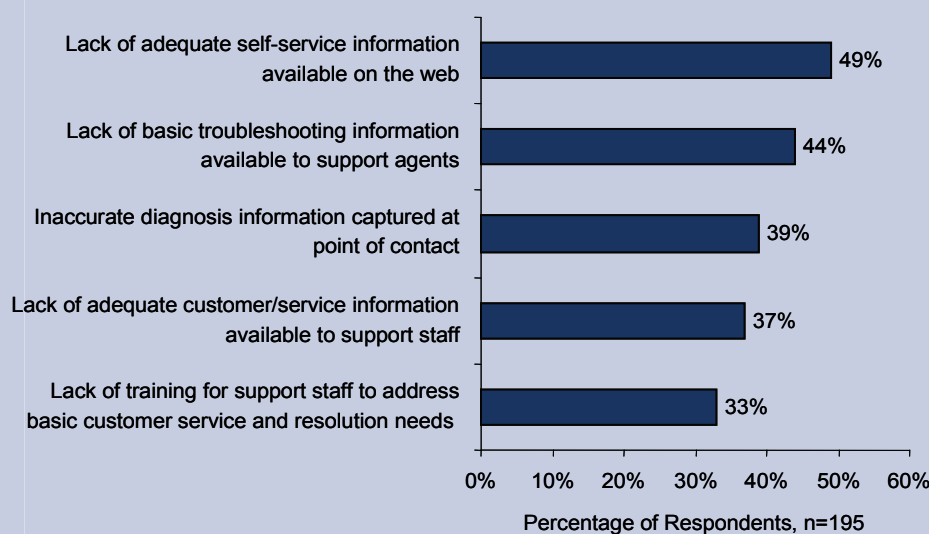
“[Our strategic plan is to] avoid the call (automate), if not - then enable the customer to self help, if not - then serve the customers needs through the lowest cost, customer preferred channel.”

~ Business Leader,  
Large North American PC  
Manufacturer

### Aberdeen Insights — Why Do Unnecessary Dispatches Continue to Occur?

While not all of the 34% of service issues that could have been resolved by a cheaper channel are tied to unnecessary field dispatches, these do present a significant cost burden. Aberdeen's research throughout 2009 has highlighted that \$276 is the cost associated with every single dispatch. As such, service organizations are investigating means to eliminate unnecessary dispatches through the better capture and sharing of service knowledge throughout the delivery ecosystem. The lack of adequate resolution information available to contact center and other support professionals, coupled with the lack of support information available online to customers are the major reasons why unnecessary dispatches continue to occur. With improved training regimens and better knowledge management processes, support agents can be equipped to tackle a larger number of support issues which they traditionally might have routed to a higher tier agent or to a field-based visit.

**Figure 4: Primary Reasons for Unnecessary Field Dispatches**



Note: respondents were asked to choose the top five  
Source: Aberdeen Group, September 2009

### The Maturity Class Framework

The ability to manage the highlighted pressures (Figure 1) is the true measure of a Best-in-Class service organization. Efficiency in service request handling is reflected in first call resolution rates, which manifests itself in improved productivity as tabulated through improvements in service request closure rates. The combined impact of efficiency and productivity is

felt not only in the cost of service but also in customer satisfaction levels. Ultimately, changes in all of the above metrics are reflected in the profitability driven from the service side of the business.

As such, Aberdeen's framework to determine Best-in-Class is based on a combination of these metrics. Respondents are rewarded not only for the success in current performance but also for their ability to greatly move these metrics in the right direction.

**Table 2: Top Performers Earn Best-in-Class Status**

Definition of Maturity Class	Mean Class Performance
<b>Best-in-Class: Top 20%</b> of aggregate performance scorers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 75% current performance in first-call resolution</li> <li>▪ 24% increase in productivity (service requests closed daily) over the last 12 months</li> <li>▪ 21% reduction in total support costs over the last year</li> <li>▪ 24% current level of service margins (profit/revenue)</li> </ul>
<b>Industry Average: Middle 50%</b> of aggregate performance scorers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 62% current performance in first-call resolution</li> <li>▪ 5% increase in productivity (service requests closed daily) over the last 12 months</li> <li>▪ 3% reduction in total support costs over the last year</li> <li>▪ 15% current level of service margins (profit/revenue)</li> </ul>
<b>Laggard: Bottom 30%</b> of aggregate performance scorers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 53% current performance in first-call resolution</li> <li>▪ 1% increase in productivity (service requests closed daily) over the last 12 months</li> <li>▪ 2% <b>increase</b> in total support costs over the last year</li> <li>▪ 8% current level of service margins (profit/revenue)</li> </ul>

Source: Aberdeen Group, September 2009

When compared to all other organizations, Best-in-Class service firms drive significantly greater service margins (24% for Best-in-Class versus 13% for all others) as attributed by considerable out performance in productivity, efficiency and customer management metrics (Table 2). Customers of Best-in-Class organizations report a 4.3/5 level of satisfaction when compared to a 3.8/5 rating for all other firms. Regardless of the support channel, customers of Best-in-Class service organizations are receiving faster access to more accurate service information, as reflected in lower call abandonment rates (12% for Best-in-Class versus 14% for all other organizations) and better first-call resolution rates (75% for Best-in-Class versus 60% for all other organizations). Better first-call resolution is also a major contributor to significant decreases in service and support costs experienced by Best-in-Class service firms. In addition, these firms are also more successful in routing their customers to the right (least cost for information required) service delivery channels as reflected in a 24% result in service requests that could have been resolved by cheaper channels in the last 12 months, when compared to a 36% result for all other organizations.

"One of our major issues is that we don't completely control first-call resolution. First contact is made by our outsourcing company, so we have to continue to improve our alignment with our outsourcing company in order to be able to measure both our performance and theirs with regard to our customer."

~ Management Member,  
 Kyocera Mita European Service

## The Best-in-Class PACE Model

Aberdeen’s PACE framework is designed to highlight the key strategies and capabilities employed by firms that attain Best-in-Class status through their excellence in meeting and overcoming internal or market pressures. The framework serves as a roadmap for non-Best-in-Class firms to duplicate the strategies enforced and capabilities developed by Best-in-Class firms to improve their service performance (Table 3).

**Table 3: The Best-in-Class PACE Framework**

Pressures	Actions	Capabilities	Enablers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Customer demand for faster service resolution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increase organization-wide access to customer and service-specific information - better integration of data</li> <li>▪ Ensure consistency and accuracy of all service information across all points of interaction</li> <li>▪ Proactively capture/monitor customer feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Executive-level oversight of all customer service operations</li> <li>▪ Real-time capture and storage of service, asset and customer-specific information</li> <li>▪ Organization-wide access to online (searchable) database of customer and service information</li> <li>▪ Immediate capture of customer feedback</li> <li>▪ Standardized escalation procedures</li> <li>▪ Education/Information campaigns to make customers aware of non contact-center based solutions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Front-line customer service agent access/ability to:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Online (searchable) resolution steps and decision tree</li> <li>- Instantly connect customer to higher level support</li> <li>- Schedule field technician visit with access to schedule availability</li> <li>- Customer SLA/warranty information</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Customer access/ability to:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Web portal with recent activity etc.</li> <li>- Issue resolution decision tree and search results</li> <li>- Resolution/information videos</li> <li>- Product-specific forums</li> <li>- Access to customized offers</li> <li>- Schedule technician visit</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ SMS updates to customers regarding product/service updates, technician status etc based on a mobile messaging platform</li> <li>▪ CRM solution with contact center functionality</li> <li>▪ Service management with contact center functionality</li> <li>▪ Web-based self service/support</li> <li>▪ Knowledge management solution</li> </ul>

Source: Aberdeen Group, September 2009

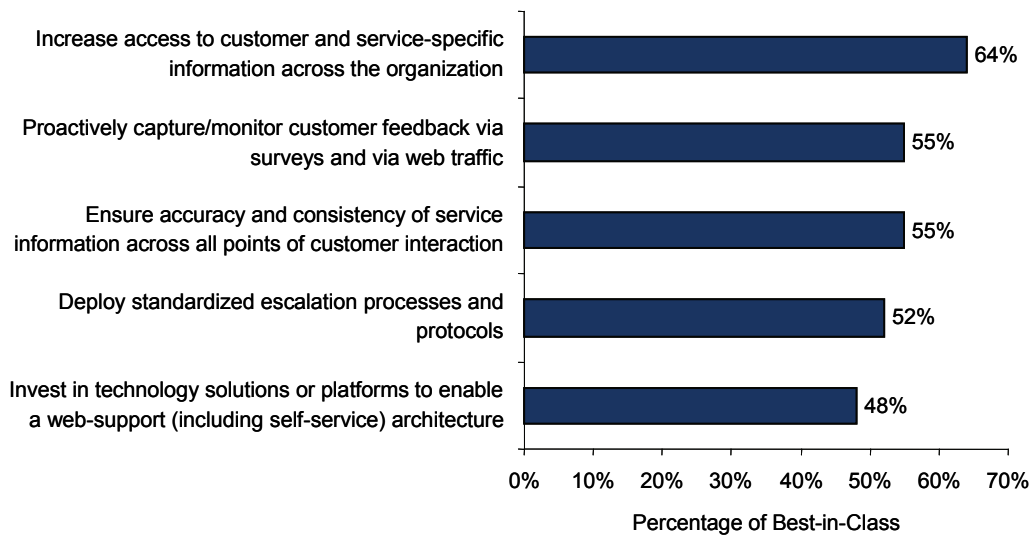
## Best-in-Class Strategies

In order to tame the pressures for efficient service resolution in the contact center or via the web, Best-in-Class organizations are looking to implement systems and processes so as to ensure that all stakeholders (internal and external) are equipped with appropriate information so as to resolve service issues promptly.

From an internal point-of-view, Best-in-Class organizations are actively looking to guarantee that customer and service-specific information is

available to all support agents across the organization. As such they are looking to integrate captured service data into their enterprise-wide systems to equip front-line support agents with adequate customer and service information so they can troubleshoot and resolve minor service tasks (Figure 5). For those issues that cannot be resolved at the front-line, Best-in-Class organizations are looking to provide their support staff with standardized escalation processes and protocols to minimize the number of transfers and time taken to resolve a customer query.

**Figure 5: Strategic Actions to Improve Customer Service Management in Contact Center and Other Support Channels**



Note: respondents chose top five  
Source: Aberdeen Group, September 2009

Along with investments in knowledge management, nearly one half of Best-in-Class firms are also looking to make investments in web support and self-service technology so as to expand on efficient avenues available to customers for service and support. An action that is more characteristic of the Best-in-Class (55%) in comparison to all others (41%) is the investment made from an organizational point of view to ensure the accuracy, validity and consistency of service data across all points of customer interaction. As noted earlier, multiple channels of service delivery will only reduce the burden on the contact center or field service if they provide accurate and effective service information. Inconsistent service messages across these channels, on the other hand, will confuse customers and cause them to lose trust in the validity of these service channels - ultimately defeating their purpose.

To effectively monitor the value of these strategies, 55% of Best-in-Class organizations are also looking to proactively capture and monitor customer feedback to ensure the appropriate customer experience is delivered regardless of the delivery channel used. These surveys also enable the Best-in-Class to tweak the information and offerings available across their channels so as to meet the needs of their customers.

"If the customer knows that they won't have wasted their time on the web, then they will use it."

~ Director,  
Mid-Size North American  
Telecommunication Services  
Organization

## Chapter Two: Benchmarking Requirements for Success

The success of all initiatives and programs adopted in support of effective service delivery and customer management ultimately depends on the supporting cast of organizational capabilities and processes in place. The identification of these vital capabilities, specifically around the capture, availability and management of service information, and the organizational gaps that need to be overcome to put these in place will help service firms ascend to the status of Best-in-Class.

### Case Study — Unilever

Handling approximately 3.5 million consumer contacts annually, Unilever's contact center supports over 90 brands used by consumers in the U.S., Mexico and Canada. In support of its contact center delivery channel, the company was looking to deploy a self-service solution capable of delivering instant access to the information consumers wanted and needed, while ensuring an exceptional experience, reduced operational costs, and increased service efficiency. Past attempts at incorporating online self-service to offset the growing volume of calls and emails were short-lived. The technologies used failed to meet the company's expectations and high service standards.

The team ultimately chose a consumer-facing self-service solution from the provider of its internal contact center-based knowledge management and self-service solution. Its Popsicle®, Klondike® and Breyers® U.S. brand websites were selected for the first three implementations, as the contact center was anticipating a surge in email volume from scheduled 800 number rollouts. The return on investment with consumer self-service was immediate. Upon implementation, the solution was successfully responding to 90% of all inquiries. Emails escalated to representatives were reduced to just 10%.

Following the initial three sites, Unilever implemented self-service on its Promise® and Hellmann's® brand websites in early September 2009, followed closely by the Skippy® website. Due to the ease of implementation and rapid consumer uptake, the company is well on track to meet its 2009 goal of taking seven of its high-traffic sites live.

Unilever's online self-service success is enabled by the presence of an overall knowledge engine, which was designed to be effective at addressing and resolving a wide variety of issues via a company's web site, intranet portal, contact center, email, chat, or other channel. The system understands and processes natural language, so it can interpret the meaning behind consumers' questions to deliver highly specific, concise and accurate responses up to 99% of the time. The user (consumer or agent) can ask a question and quickly receive an answer, with minimal effort.

*continued*

### Fast Facts

- √ **24%** of service issues could have been resolved by a cheaper delivery channel by Best-in-Class organizations, compared to 44% for Laggards
- √ Best-in-Class organizations are nearly **two times** as likely to all others to leverage self-service, knowledge management or CRM-enabled contact center management solutions
- √ **10%** reduction in total service costs is seen by the Best-in-Class from the use of self-service solutions
- √ **18%** increase in call center agent productivity experienced by Best-in-Class organizations from the use of contact center management solutions
- √ **24%** reduction in calls resulting in dispatch for Best-in-Class organizations from the use of knowledge management solutions

### Case Study — Unilever

When more information is needed from the user to better understand their specific needs and questions, the system's conversational capabilities enable it to mimic an expert "live" agent. It engages them in an interactive, text-based dialog to arrive at relevant and contextual responses to questions. Higher issue resolution rates result. When appropriate, the system has also been structured to leverage user input to retrieve and incorporate specific information from consumer, product and other data repositories into its responses. This enables Unilever to fine tune the way it addresses the consumers' specific needs or situations, resulting in more personalized service. Since implementation, Unilever has seen high-impact results, including:

- A 90% reduction in email volume as a result of effective online self-service
- A 50% reduction in calls to the internal help desk, as its base of approximately 135 agents have immediate access to vast information from knowledge bases throughout the enterprise
- An improvement in handle time
- Online access to packaging information and graphics for the first time ever, enabling the company to eliminate its vast repository of physical packages for hundreds of products.

All of the functionality gained from the overall solution is critical for Unilever, given its wide-array of brands, products and consumer needs. The solution allows for greater versatility, while enabling the organization to deliver consistent, "branded" answers and information through multiple communications channels.

Ultimately, the focus on the overall knowledge management and self-service solution facilitates best-in-class service through the contact center and online; increases efficiency in the contact center; and enhances consumer satisfaction. The company can also capture cross-channel, actionable "voice of the consumer" insights to drive continuous performance improvements, deliver a better consumer experience, assist in product development and enhancement, pinpoint opportunities and trends, manage risk, and augment market research.

### Competitive Assessment

Best-in-Class service firms, as determined by their performance in key indicators, exhibit several of the capabilities highlighted in Table 4 that fall into the five categories of Aberdeen's Competitive Framework: (1) **process** (workflows for contact management, escalation, and feedback management); (2) **organization** (corporate focus on the opportunity for improved customer service through multiple service delivery channels, coupled with increased visibility and oversight); (3) **knowledge management** (making asset and service data available to stakeholders that can act on the information to impact profitability); (4) **technology** (the selection of

appropriate tools and the intelligent deployment of those tools); and (5) **performance management** (the ability of the organization to track / measure performance and drive further improvements with necessary modifications to processes in place).

**Table 4: The Competitive Framework**

	Best-in-Class	Average	Laggards
<b>Process</b>	Real-time capture of service, asset and customer-specific service information		
	76%	51%	36%
<b>Process</b>	Front-line agents have ability/power to instantly connect customer to higher level support to ensure resolution		
	73%	45%	43%
<b>Organization</b>	Customers are provided online access to complementary products and services based on service history		
	45%	19%	14%
<b>Organization</b>	Focus on outreach programs to make customers aware of non contact-center based service delivery models		
	36%	10%	16%
<b>Knowledge</b>	Front-line support agents have real-time access to searchable resolution steps or decision tree		
	61%	36%	29%
<b>Knowledge</b>	Organization-wide access to online (searchable) database of captured service, asset or customer-specific information		
	45%	39%	31%
<b>Knowledge</b>	Customers have instant web-based access to resolution videos or issue resolution decision trees		
	27%	16%	12%
<b>Technology</b>	Customer Management technology currently in use:		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 67% CRM Solution with Contact Center functionality</li> <li>▪ 48% Service Management with Contact Center functionality</li> <li>▪ 48% Web-based Self-Service</li> <li>▪ 42% Knowledge Management</li> <li>▪ 30% Mobile Messaging platforms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 41% CRM Solution with Contact Center functionality</li> <li>▪ 27% Service Management with Contact Center functionality</li> <li>▪ 31% Web-based Self-Service</li> <li>▪ 31% Knowledge Management</li> <li>▪ 13% Mobile Messaging platforms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 36% CRM Solution with Contact Center functionality</li> <li>▪ 19% Service Management with Contact Center functionality</li> <li>▪ 20% Web-based Self-Service</li> <li>▪ 10% Knowledge Management</li> <li>▪ 6% Mobile Messaging platforms</li> </ul>
<b>Performance</b>	Immediate capture of customer feedback following any service session (phone, web, field etc.)		
	67%	33%	39%

"10% of our overall ticket count is for password resets. This is a relatively easy issue to automate, but getting customers to use the tool requires some training. By the time they need the tool again, they have forgotten the tool exists or where to find it. As a result, the ticket portal needs to have some logic behind [it], [for example] a skills-based routing tree."

~ Derek Hodovance,  
 Vice President - Operations,  
 Unity Business Networks

Source: Aberdeen Group, September 2009

## Capabilities and Enablers

---

The Competitive Framework (Table 4) highlights that Best-in-Class performance isn't predicated on excellence in one of the support categories. Best-in-Class organizations exhibit a comprehensive focus on all of the following support structures to strengthen planned strategic actions (Figure 5). In the context of the contact center and other non-field based customer service delivery channels, a majority of the capabilities also fall into buckets that are characterized by the five E's - Educate, Eliminate, Escalate, Evaluate, and Empower. These will be further examined in the upcoming sections.

### Process

In Figure 5, Best-in-Class firms indicated their intentions towards standardizing escalation protocols and processes so as to ensure that if a front line agent isn't capable of resolving customer issues, regardless of channel of contact, they have proper guidance to ensure that the customer request is escalated to the appropriate technical support person for appropriate resolution. Standardized escalation protocols also extend to those customers who might not be in contact with a support person but are routing their request through an IVR on the phone or through diagnostic steps on the web. While 45% of the Best-in-Class consider this to be a key action moving forward, 52% indicate that they already have standardized processes in place for all channels (compared to 48% of all others). More so, when it comes to live support agents, 73% of the Best-in-Class provide their agents with the authority and capability to directly connect a customer to a higher-level support agent when necessary, compared to 45% of Industry Average firms. Needless to say, this doesn't mean that every call or request that comes in is ultimately escalated to a more expensive or resource-constrained technical support agent. Standardized escalation processes and procedures provide support agents (or the support system) with a map as to what avenues of assistance can be relied upon to ensure that the customer request is resolved in a timely and efficient manner.

In addition to escalation protocols, Best-in-Class support agents are also empowered with access to vital information and processes to adequately treat a customer request as a component of an overall relationship lifecycle as opposed to a one off event. These agents are provided with real-time access to customer service history which could assist in identifying minor issues that have occurred in the past or major product failure trends that need to be handled prior to further issue escalation.

For minor issues, more than 60% of Best-in-Class front line agents have access to online and searchable decision trees or resolution steps that have been captured from past work done on similar products. These can help the agent guide customers through basic troubleshooting and issue resolution. For issues that are perhaps more severe, customers can immediately be routed to higher-level support agents. If required, an appointment can also be made during the initial customer session as 70% of Best-in-Class firms report that their contact center agents have direct visibility into technician schedules. With access to SLA/warranty information, the contact center

"[Our most successful steps have been] creating a portal that guides the customer to the right web locations."

~ Business Leader,  
Large North American PC  
Manufacturer

agent can also appropriately bill the customer for services rendered so as to ensure expedited billing.

**Table 5: Capabilities in Demand on the Phone**

Contact Center Agent Ability / Access to:	Percentage of Respondents Reporting In Place	
	Best-in-Class	All Others
Customer service history - site or asset-based in real-time	85%	73%
Instantly connect customer to tech support or higher level support	73%	44%
Schedule technician visit with insight into technician availability	70%	23%
Online and searchable resolution steps/decision trees as determined by experts or past history	61%	33%
Customer SLA information	55%	32%
Warranty information	45%	27%
Add/remove features to products/services leveraged by customers	42%	22%
Customer website usage history and other service interaction	39%	26%
Customized sale offers based on service history	39%	23%

Source: Aberdeen Group, September 2009

In certain cases, trends in customer service queries can also alert the contact center agent to complementary services and offerings that the customer might not be aware of. While this cross-pollination of service and sales activities requires a focus on training, Best-in-Class companies are much more likely to provide their front line agents with access to such sale offerings based on customer usage and service history. Therefore, by looking at and treating the customer request as a component of an overall relationship, Best-in-Class organizations are able to empower their contact center agents with the necessary tools to guide the customer through service and sales scenarios that would not have been possible without the appropriate access to information.

The real-time access to information available in Table 5 is partially attributable to the strict focus on Best-in-Class companies in capturing service and asset performance information in real-time. Without this level of information capture evidenced by 76% of Best-in-Class firms, resolution scenarios provided by contact center agents could be dated and result in further service requests and complaints by the customer.

**Knowledge Management**

Knowledge-based empowerment, as enabled with access to service and customer lifecycle data isn't limited to front-line contact center agents at Best-in-Class organizations. Forty-five percent (45%) of these firms indicate making service, asset and customer data available across the entire organization, when compared to 36% of all other respondents. Access to

"We have tons and tons of information. The shortage is in the art of using that data for the right purpose."

~Procurement Manager,  
 Southwestern Energy Company

this information can be leveraged by field agents to accurately diagnose and resolve service issues, and can also be leveraged by design and manufacturing teams to tweak product offerings to ensure greater product quality and reliability. With the greater push on generating service-led sales revenue, information available to sales and account managers can also drive tailored sales campaigns aimed to up sell and cross sell of complementary products and services. Once again, it must be emphasized that an effective knowledge management regime not only entails the organization-wide access and management of information, but also encompasses the continuous capture of service knowledge, as emphasized by Best-in-Class organizations (see the Process section earlier in this report).

**Table 6: Capabilities in Demand for Service Customers**

Customer Online Access/Ability to:	Percentage of Respondents Reporting In Place	
	Best-in-Class	All Others
Frequently asked service questions	61%	44%
Customized web portals with access to all recent account activity	48%	31%
Driver or software downloads and upgrades	48%	26%
Once-click email request for service follow up	45%	40%
Purchase service part or upgrade	45%	20%
Customized product/service offerings based on usage or service history	45%	17%
Billing information	42%	28%
Product-specific forums for basic troubleshooting	39%	11%
Ability to schedule (and modify) time of technician visit	33%	10%
Resolution/information videos	27%	14%
Search results for similar service queries	27%	12%
Issue resolution decision trees as determined by past history or similar issues	24%	8%
One-touch chat with live customer care agent	21%	14%
Connect with other customers	18%	5%

Source: Aberdeen Group, September 2009

Knowledge access for the Best-in-Class isn't limited to the walls of the organization. In an attempt to provide multiple layers of support to customers, these organizations are making significant efforts to increase the amount of service data made available through online portals (Table 6). While access to content (such as frequently asked questions) isn't necessarily groundbreaking, Best-in-Class organizations are taking the lead in providing customized service and resolution content to their customers. All of this is undertaken in an effort to enable a greater degree of self-service for lower-priority issues, while enabling faster contact with the service organization for high priority service issues. For example, 27% of Best-in-Class organizations feature resolution and instructional videos on their

service portals with 24% providing resolution decision trees to their customers for troubleshooting and service issues. Best-in-Class organizations are also taking steps to build connected customer networks by allowing customers to interact with one another regarding product and service experiences while also enabling discussions around basic issue resolution scenarios. While such a forum presents inherent risks by raising the opportunity for disgruntled customers to air their grievances, it also increases the ability of the servicing organization to tap into the pulse of its customer base and highlight product or service champions in their customer communities.

Looking ahead, Best-in-Class organizations are placing a great deal of emphasis on providing their customers with self-service resolution scenarios (via decision trees or videos) and on establishing the aforementioned customer communities. Nearly 20% of Best-in-Class organizations indicate that they are prioritizing the availability of these capabilities to their customers in the next 12 months. Other top priorities include the strengthening of the customer's ability to directly and quickly connect with customer care of field agents should they be unable to resolve service issues via information available on the web or through self-service portals.

#### **Aberdeen Insights — Service Through Social Media**

With the increased use of and attention paid to social media platforms and sites, one would assume a major shift by servicing organizations towards the use of these platforms to connect with customers. However, Aberdeen's current research shows that social media is yet to become a major pillar of overall customer service strategy, specifically in the B2B space. According to survey respondents, only 2% of service requests are currently generated through social media (Table 1 in Chapter One). Less than 10% of organizations indicate that they actively leverage platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, MySpace or even message boards and forums to connect with their customers.

With active interest, primarily from the Best-in-Class, in growing customer communities, there are some indications of servicing organizations beginning to look at social media platforms to provide service. Twenty-one percent (21%) of Best-in-Class organizations indicate that they plan to leverage Twitter as a customer support channel in the next 12 to 24 months with 15% indicating their interest in the use of company sponsored forums and message boards.

For the time being, the use of social media for service seems to have gained a higher level of acceptance in the B2C space as evidenced by the increasing use of Twitter by companies such as Comcast and Zappos. In B2B service, servicing organizations are still developing their strategies as to the best use of these platforms to drive efficient service delivery.

"Customers using the web first will be given priority. They will also not have to wait on the phone, in queue, but will have agents call them back. Their wait times will be counted down and made visible. For scheduling appointments, a link will be pushed to them from a web application and/or a call center agent, so they can determine the times that are best for them. Dealing with variances on the day of service will also be made pro-active and pushed to the client, especially to eliminate being held hostage in one's home waiting for service. We have developed a series of 2 minute how to's covering every service interaction / transaction from a web perspective, as well as a general one (contained at the end of every specific one as well), letting customers know that they will not have to start over with an agent if they can only get so far and run into trouble "

~ Director,  
Mid-Size North American  
Telecommunication Services  
Organization

**Technology**

The empowerment afforded by Best-in-Class organizations is also attributable to their evaluation and utilization of a broad variety of solutions to strengthen multiple channels of service delivery. When looking at broader customer management solutions to oversee the entire customer lifecycle, these firms are significantly more likely to leverage customer relationship management (nearly two times as all others) or service management solutions (more than two times as all others) with contact center management add-ons. Survey results are also beginning to reveal an increased use of mobile CRM platforms, primarily by the Best-in-Class, to enable mobile sales or service professionals to access and manage customer accounts via their handheld devices.

“We utilize an internal web tool which our partners / employees use to have access to service bulletins and technical support which has been effective in boosting contact center productivity.”

~ Management Member,  
 Kyocera Mita European Service

**Table 7: Solutions in Place**

Solution	Percentage of Firms Reporting Solution in Place	
	Best-in-Class	All Others
CRM Solution with Contact Center Management Functionality	67%	38%
Web-Based Self-Service Solution	48%	27%
Service Management Solution with Contact Center Management Functionality	48%	22%
Service or Contact Center Analytics	42%	34%
Knowledge Management Solution	42%	23%
CTI/IVR and Contact Center Routing Solutions	39%	28%
Mobile Messaging Platform	30%	11%
Stand-Alone Contact Center Management Solution	30%	24%
Mobile CRM	21%	3%

Source: Aberdeen Group, September 2009

In the contact center, nearly 40% of Best-in-Class firms leverage intelligent call routing technologies to ensure that the customer is connected to the right level of support in the quickest possible manner. The use of these solutions helps support pre-established escalation rules and protocols adapted and leveraged by Best-in-Class organizations.

On the non-contact center front and in parallel with the adoption of multiple channels of service delivery, nearly 50% of Best-in-Class firms leverage web-based self service portals and solutions for their customers. These solutions are often powered by the information captured and stored in customer management solutions as well as in the data made available via Knowledge Management platforms and solutions. As knowledge management forms a vital component of the customer management

“We would like to expand our reach past the contact center (i.e. web, SMS) in order to satisfy the needs of some of our younger / internet savvy customers who prefer to interact online as opposed to speaking to a person on the phone.”

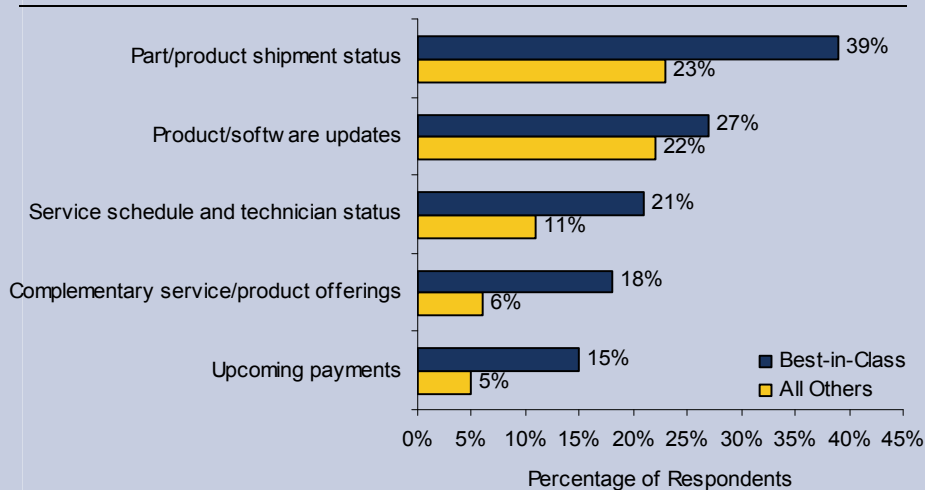
~ Don McNair, Senior Director  
 - Customer Interaction,  
 Yaskawa Electric North  
 America

strategies of Best-in-Class organizations, 42% of leading organizations are currently leveraging knowledge management solutions with another 18% evaluating the use in the next 12 to 24 months.

**Aberdeen Insights — Technology (Messaging)**

Service organizations are also beginning to leverage Short Messaging Service (SMS) as an effective communications platform to deliver important information to their customers. Best-in-Class organizations are nearly three-times as likely as all others to leverage mobile messaging platforms and leverage messaging to deliver information such as product / part shipment status or the status of scheduled service technicians to their customers. The cost of message delivery is considered to be a fraction of the cost of dispatching a service technician or following up with a phone call, and messaging also offers the servicing organization with a simple and efficient medium to reach a large base of customers in a very short period of time.

**Figure 6: Use of Messaging to Relay Information Regarding**



Source: Aberdeen Group, September 2009

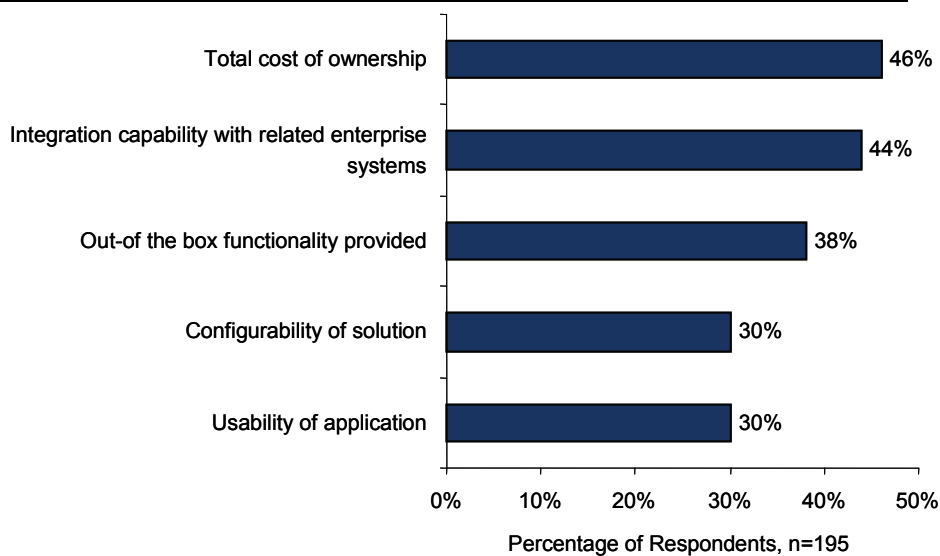
"Confirmations are sent via email and SMS, and readily allow additions to people's calendars for appointments. All back office or asynchronous completion of activities have confirmations going to people's email / SMS. We are working on SMS forms and simple smart phone apps for initiating service requests from handhelds / phones."

~ Director,  
 Mid-Size North American  
 Telecommunication Services  
 Organization

Despite the significant adoption of customer management solutions by Best-in-Class organizations, the current economic climate poses significant challenges for other organizations in the acquisition of customer, knowledge and other service management solutions. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of organizations indicate that they are delaying the purchase of such solutions with 15% claiming to delay deployment in the short-term. For the senior service executives or joint taskforces of business owners and IT, primarily responsible for the purchase of such solutions, total cost of ownership is the most significant factor considered in the purchase of customer management solutions. This is perhaps magnified in the current economic climate. A great deal of interest is also paid to the resources and time

required to insure effective integration of data collected with supporting enterprise applications. A drawn out integration timeline can add a significant cost burden to the adopting organization and further diminish the ROI seen from such technology investments.

**Figure 7: Solution Selection Framework**



Note: respondents chose top four  
Source: Aberdeen Group, September 2009

### **Performance Management and Organization**

To accurately gauge the impact of investments in technology and of process or protocol changes, Best-in-Class service firms are looking to get a real-time view of the performance of their service operations. As such, 42% report having made commitments to service or contact center analytics to keep a close eye on their performance in key operational metrics such as first-call resolution rate, call abandonment rate as well as in key financial metrics such as cost of support, overtime costs, NCVI, and overall profitability. To keep tabs on customer sentiment, 70% of Best-in-Class firms report the frequent measurement of customer satisfaction and retention. To aid in the capture of customer-specific metrics, two-thirds of Best-in-Class organizations actively pursue the capture of customer feedback after every customer service session in order to ascertain steps that need to be taken to enrich the overall customer experience.

"I'd say the [greatest benefit] is the automated customer satisfaction survey that we add at the close of a ticket. While only a fraction of tickets result in a completed survey – the feedback is more valuable [than] raw ticket stats. Web based client contact centers allow for more of that feedback by making it easy to capture the data without necessarily bogging the customer down for a full survey."

~ Derek Hodovance,  
Vice President - Operations,  
Unity Business Networks

**Aberdeen Insights — Performance Management (ROI)**

A real-time view of performance also enables the capture of improvements in KPIs attributable to investments in technology. The ability to ascertain such ROI information can greatly assist the service organizations in making investments in the right set of tools, specifically in challenging economic climates. For example, Best-in-Class companies have seen significant improvements in call agent productivity and handling time with the use of contact center management solutions. These organizations are also able to unearth substantial returns from the use of self-service and knowledge management solutions (Table 8).

**Table 8: Capturing the Returns**

	<b>Avg. Change for Best-in-Class with Use of Solution</b>
<b>With the Use of Contact Center Solution (Embedded in CRM/Serv or Otherwise)</b>	
<i>Increase in Call Center Agent Productivity</i>	18%
<i>Decrease in Call Handling Time</i>	17%
<b>With Knowledge Management Solution</b>	
<i>Decrease in Calls Resulting in Dispatch</i>	24%
<i>Increase in Customer Satisfaction</i>	26%
<b>With Web Self-Service</b>	
<i>Increase in Customer Satisfaction</i>	19%
<i>Decrease Total Contact Center Support Costs</i>	10%

Source: Aberdeen Group, September 2009

"The customer management solution has allowed our customer facing associates to get a better view of the customer. This includes demographics, access to all customer transactions, and any problems the customer has had. Since [implementation of] the technology we have seen an increase of more than two points in our annual customer satisfaction survey, while reducing or reallocating staffing to other areas."

~ Don McNair,  
 Senior Director - Customer Interaction,  
 Yaskawa Electric North America

Systems and processes in place at Best-in-Class organizations are only possible due to the commitment and presence of strong service organizations that ultimately run as profit centers. This begins with the existence of executive-level service leadership that oversees and has visibility into all aspects of customer service as present at 79% of Best-in-Class organizations and only 57% of all others. Service executives with profit and loss responsibility of their service operations can take necessary steps to ensure that the service organization is working to:

- Eliminate unnecessary processes and steps to customer issue resolution
- Escalate vital customer service issues to the right channel of service delivery
- Evaluate technology solutions to drive knowledge and efficiency in the service organization

- **Empower** front line support workers and customers with the right information to ensure that service issues are resolved quickly and effectively; and finally
- **Educate** both internal and external stakeholders on the use of available channels and support structures. For example, 52% of Best-in-Class organizations train their support staff on a frequent basis so as to improve diagnosis, resolution and escalation capabilities while leveraging the available tools and information. In addition, 36% of Best-in-Class organizations (compared to 12% of all others) support outreach and education campaigns to ensure that their customers are aware on non contact-based service delivery channels. This ensures that customers are aware of the support capabilities available on the web and via other channels to address all their service capabilities, which assists in driving down the burden placed on more expensive resources in the support organization.

With a combined strategy that addresses the five E's, it isn't surprising that the Best-in-Class are the most efficient in the routing and resolution of customer requests (Table 8), which is ultimately, reflected in improved customer management, cost reduction and overall profitability numbers (Table 2).

**Table 9: Impact of the 5Es**

Maturity Class	Percentage of Service Requests that Could Have Been Resolved by a Less Expensive (and Available) Delivery Channel
Best-in-Class	24%
Industry Average	32%
Laggard	44%

Source: Aberdeen Group, September 2009

## Chapter Three: Required Actions

Whether a company is trying to move its performance in service delivery and customer satisfaction from Laggard to Industry Average, or Industry Average to Best-in-Class, the following actions, generally encompassed in the five E framework illustrated earlier, will help spur the necessary performance improvements:

### Laggard Steps to Success

Regardless of support channel leveraged, empowerment and education form the basic structure that Laggard organizations can rely on to drive better visibility and performance in their service organizations.

- **Empower support staff with real-time access to information.** Initial steps for Laggard organizations to boost their customer service performance revolve around improved information capture and availability. Currently only 36% indicate that they capture service and performance data in real-time when (compared to 76% of the Best-in-Class) while only 31% indicate making this data available across the organization. Seventy-three percent (73%) of Laggards indicate that the increased access to and integration of service data is a key strategic action to be pursued in the next 12 months. While an immediate jump from zero data access to real-time data support might be too large of an investment, these firms should consider a scalable roadmap of data availability to assist their support staff in improving issue resolution capabilities. Initial steps could include improving access to past customer service history or customer entitlements with a gradual move towards providing resolution practices and decision trees, features that are a high priority for 31% of Laggard organizations.
- **Continue to focus on empowerment with frequent training and education for support staff.** Forty-three percent (43%) of Laggard organizations indicate that unnecessary field dispatches continue to occur due to the lack of basic troubleshooting information and data available at the initial line of support. Another 33% blame the occurrence of dispatches on inadequate training provided to the support staff. Access to real-time data doesn't materialize into improved customer service if the support team is unaware of what to do with the data. Compared to 43% of Laggard organizations, 52% of Best-in-Class firms focus on frequent training and education programs to improve issue diagnosis, triage, and resolution in the contact center or other non-field based channels of support.
- **Integrate all service departments under the leadership of a service executive.** Compared to 79% of Best-in-Class organizations, only 59% of Laggards indicate having a single service

### Fast Facts

- √ **76%** of Best-in-Class organizations capture performance data in real-time compared to 36% of Laggards
- √ **45%** of Best-in-Class organizations have customer and service information available across the organization versus 31% of Laggards
- √ **79%** of Best-in-Class organizations have a senior executive in charge of all customer service divisions versus 59% of Laggards
- √ **36%** of Best-in-Class organizations have structured outreach and education programs regarding the availability of multiple service delivery channels compared to 10% of Industry Average organizations

executive in charge of all customer service activities. As such service silos such as field service, contact center and web support are managed as separate teams hindering the integration of customer and service information across all delivery channels. In turn, this reduces the management of a customer relationship to a series of isolated transactions and complicates the lifecycle management approach preferred by the Best-in-Class. This is further evidenced by the fact that customer management solution purchases are most likely to be by contact center managers at Laggard organizations as opposed to service executives at leading organizations - essentially leading to the evaluation and acquisition of solutions in isolation without consideration made to the integration of data that resides in individual systems. Forty-three percent (43%) of Laggards are actively considering the integration of all service departments under a single service leader as a key strategic action in the next 12 months.

- **Initiate standardized escalation procedures to eliminate unnecessary transfers and to reduce resolution times.** The focus on standardized escalation processes and protocols evidenced at Best-in-Class organizations is missing at the lower levels of the Maturity framework with only 43% of Laggards indicating the provision of these protocols to their support staffs when compared to 73% of Best-in-Class. These protocols can greatly assist contact center and other support staff in determining the optimal route to follow to expeditiously and efficiently resolve a customer issue. Without these protocols in place, customers at Laggard organizations face numerous transfers, longer hold times and longer overall resolution times. Lack of standardization could also mean that a more expensive resource is relied upon to ultimately resolve lower priority service issues, thereby further damaging service margins.

"As the age of a majority of our workers is more than 50, we have found a huge gap in the capture / retention of experience with regards to service and asset management. What is need is improved knowledge management for the workers and a focus on training from our leadership."

~Procurement Manager,  
Southwestern Energy Company

## Industry Average Steps to Success

---

- **Educate customers on availability of non-contact center-based support channels.** There isn't a great deal of difference in the use of non contact center-based support channels between Best-in-Class and Industry Average firms. However, leading organizations do a significantly better job in raising awareness to and educating their customers on the availability on these support channels. Only 10% of Industry Average organizations have formal outreach and education programs in place regarding the existence of multiple support channels when compared to 36% of Best-in-Class organizations.
- **Empower customers with better self-service information.** Fifty-one percent (51%) of Industry Average firms attribute the use of less cost-effective service delivery channels on the lack of self-service information available to customers. Nearly three quarters

(74%) of these firms do indicate that the provision of self-service systems and information is a key strategic action to be undertaken in the next 12 months.

- **Start considering the revenue implications of customer lifecycle management.** Industry Average organizations place significantly less importance on the revenue implications tied to excellent customer service and customer relationship management. As such, these firms are less likely to provide their support staffs or their customers with access to complementary product or service offerings based on past usage or service history. Only 23% of Industry Average firms provide their contact center agents with information on complementary offerings when compared to 39% of the Best-in-Class. In an economic climate where cost cutting initiatives have been stretched to the maximum, identifying and leveraging revenue growth opportunities through customer service can greatly assist these organizations in raising their service margins to the level of Best-in-Class.
- **Equip contact center staff with improved customer relationship management tools.** The following capabilities are those that are considerably relied on by Best-in-Class contact center staff. Access to the following tools can greatly assist the support staff at Industry Average organizations in raising the efficiency of service delivery:
  - Access to online and searchable resolution steps and decision trees (61% of Best-in-Class versus 36% of Industry Average)
  - Access to customer website usage/query history and other customer interaction (39% of Best-in-Class versus 25% of Industry Average)
  - Ability to schedule field visit with direct insight into technician availability (70% of Best-in-Class versus 26% of Industry Average)
  - Access to customer entitlement information (55% of Best-in-Class versus 37% of Industry Average)

"The self help tools need to be easier and / or faster than calling technical support, otherwise the client is not inclined to use them."

~ Derek Hodovance,  
Vice President - Operations,  
Unity Business Networks

## Best-in-Class Steps to Success

---

- **Continue to invest in consistency of service message across all delivery channels.** Fifty-five percent (55%) of Best-in-Class firms are taking active steps to ensure the consistency of data and information available across all service delivery channels. In fact, 30% of these organizations have dedicated support teams that monitor the service information available across all web-based support channels. Inconsistent information can greatly mitigate the value on cost-efficient service delivery channels as it can create confusion and distrust in the minds of customers who will ultimately resort to a phone call or demand a field visit for service issue resolution.

- **Customize customer content on online support channels.** Online support portals offer the servicing organization with the opportunity to inject a greater deal of customization in the overall service experience. Twenty-one percent (21%) of Best-in-Class firms are prioritizing the provision of customized service portals to their customers in the next 12 to 24 months. These portals not only allow customers to view past service histories, troubleshoot and resolve specific service issues, order required service parts or replacements, but also enable them to access similar customer service requests or connect with other customers facing similar service issues so as to increase the amount of actionable service resolution available to the customer.

#### Aberdeen Insights — Summary

With the focus being paid to multiple points of attack (as per the origin of customer service requests), it should be noted that the customer service organization is now equipped and has numerous avenues of defense to ensure that all customer needs, no matter how large or small, are effectively and efficiently met. While all available channels of service delivery aren't ultimately applicable to all service firms and their customers, the key is to meet the customers in the forum where they are comfortable and guide and educate them to the value of forums that might offer a better, faster, and most importantly a successful customer experience.

"[Our organization plans to improve by continuing] to bring the voice of the customer into the organization. Understanding the good, bad, and ugly of how we service them and then provide the service team with the tools that they need. Enhancing our knowledge base information for our agents and customers will provide a positive return. The jury is still out on how social media will be integrated in our customer support tools, but we will listen to the customer to find out how we can support them in this area."

~ Don McNair,  
Senior Director - Customer  
Interaction,  
Yaskawa Electric North  
America

## Appendix A: Research Methodology

Between August and September 2009, Aberdeen examined the experiences and intentions of more than 190 service and manufacturing enterprises in the use and selection of non-field based service delivery channels.

Aberdeen supplemented this online survey effort with interviews with select survey respondents, gathering additional information on best practices in customer request and relationship management, identifying desired contact center and other support functionalities, and in understanding the resulting benefits of investments in improved customer management capabilities through a variety of service delivery channels.

Responding enterprises included the following:

- *Job title / function:* The research sample included respondents with the following job titles: C-Level executive (11%); Vice-President or Director (36%); and Manager (31%).
- *Industry:* The following industries had the largest representation in the study: IT Services (13%); Medical Devices (12%); Finance, Banking and Insurance (11%); Manufacturing (11%); Office and Computer Equipment (9%); and Telecom (9%).
- *Geography:* The majority of respondents (60%) were from North America. Remaining respondents were mostly from the Asia-Pacific region (12%) and from EMEA (22%).
- *Company size:* Thirty percent (30%) of respondents were from large enterprises (annual revenues above US \$1 billion); 32% were from midsize enterprises (annual revenues between \$50 million and \$1 billion); and 38% of respondents were from small businesses (annual revenues of \$50 million or less).
- *Contact Center Headcount:* Twenty-three percent (23%) of respondents were from large service enterprises (contact center agent headcount greater than 500); 23% were from midsize service enterprises (contact center agent headcount between 50 and 500); and 56% of respondents were from small businesses (contact center agent headcount less than 50).

### Study Focus

Responding service executives completed an online survey that included questions designed to determine the following:

- √ The degree to which various support channels are leveraged and the financial implications of reliance on these channels
- √ The structure and effectiveness of existing customer support technology implementations
- √ Current and planned use of tools, functionalities and applications to aid service processes
- √ The benefits, if any, that have been derived improved customer service and customer management initiatives.

The study aimed to identify emerging best practices in support of customer service in the contact center and other delivery channels, and to provide a framework by which readers could assess and map their own customer service management capabilities.

**Table 10: The PACE Framework Key**

Overview
<p>Aberdeen applies a methodology to benchmark research that evaluates the business pressures, actions, capabilities, and enablers (PACE) that indicate corporate behavior in specific business processes. These terms are defined as follows:</p> <p><b>Pressures</b> — external forces that impact an organization’s market position, competitiveness, or business operations (e.g., economic, political and regulatory, technology, changing customer preferences, competitive)</p> <p><b>Actions</b> — the strategic approaches that an organization takes in response to industry pressures (e.g., align the corporate business model to leverage industry opportunities, such as product / service strategy, target markets, financial strategy, go-to-market, and sales strategy)</p> <p><b>Capabilities</b> — the business process competencies required to execute corporate strategy (e.g., skilled people, brand, market positioning, viable products / services, ecosystem partners, financing)</p> <p><b>Enablers</b> — the key functionality of technology solutions required to support the organization’s enabling business practices (e.g., development platform, applications, network connectivity, user interface, training and support, partner interfaces, data cleansing, and management)</p>

Source: Aberdeen Group, September 2009

**Table 11: The Competitive Framework Key**

Overview	
<p>The Aberdeen Competitive Framework defines enterprises as falling into one of the following three levels of practices and performance:</p> <p><b>Best-in-Class (20%)</b> — Practices that are the best currently being employed and are significantly superior to the Industry Average, and result in the top industry performance.</p> <p><b>Industry Average (50%)</b> — Practices that represent the average or norm, and result in average industry performance.</p> <p><b>Laggards (30%)</b> — Practices that are significantly behind the average of the industry, and result in below average performance.</p>	<p>In the following categories:</p> <p><b>Process</b> — What is the scope of process standardization? What is the efficiency and effectiveness of this process?</p> <p><b>Organization</b> — How is your company currently organized to manage and optimize this particular process?</p> <p><b>Knowledge</b> — What visibility do you have into key data and intelligence required to manage this process?</p> <p><b>Technology</b> — What level of automation have you used to support this process? How is this automation integrated and aligned?</p> <p><b>Performance</b> — What do you measure? How frequently? What’s your actual performance?</p>

Source: Aberdeen Group, September 2009

**Table 12: The Relationship Between PACE and the Competitive Framework**

PACE and the Competitive Framework – How They Interact
<p>Aberdeen research indicates that companies that identify the most influential pressures and take the most transformational and effective actions are most likely to achieve superior performance. The level of competitive performance that a company achieves is strongly determined by the PACE choices that they make and how well they execute those decisions.</p>

Source: Aberdeen Group, September 2009

## Appendix B: Related Aberdeen Research

Related Aberdeen research that forms a companion or reference to this report includes:

- [\*Driving Self-Service Into the Call Center\*](#); May 2007
- [\*Industry Best Practices in Service Contact Centers\*](#); March 2007
- [\*Size Matters in Product Center Call Center Performance\*](#); December 2006
- [\*Consumer Products, Telco/Utilities Boast Top Call Centers\*](#); December 2006
- [\*Shoring Up the Front Lines of Product Service: The Call Center\*](#); September 2006

Information on these and any other Aberdeen publications can be found at [www.aberdeen.com](http://www.aberdeen.com).

Author: Sumair Dutta, Senior Research Analyst, Strategic Service Management, ([sumair.dutta@aberdeen.com](mailto:sumair.dutta@aberdeen.com));

Since 1988, Aberdeen's research has been helping corporations worldwide become Best-in-Class. Having benchmarked the performance of more than 644,000 companies, Aberdeen is uniquely positioned to provide organizations with the facts that matter — the facts that enable companies to get ahead and drive results. That's why our research is relied on by more than 2.2 million readers in over 40 countries, 90% of the Fortune 1,000, and 93% of the Technology 500.

As a Harte-Hanks Company, Aberdeen plays a key role of putting content in context for the global direct and targeted marketing company. Aberdeen's analytical and independent view of the "customer optimization" process of Harte-Hanks (Information – Opportunity – Insight – Engagement – Interaction) extends the client value and accentuates the strategic role Harte-Hanks brings to the market. For additional information, visit Aberdeen <http://www.aberdeen.com> or call (617) 723-7890, or to learn more about Harte-Hanks, call (800) 456-9748 or go to <http://www.harte-hanks.com>.

This document is the result of primary research performed by Aberdeen Group. Aberdeen Group's methodologies provide for objective fact-based research and represent the best analysis available at the time of publication. Unless otherwise noted, the entire contents of this publication are copyrighted by Aberdeen Group, Inc. and may not be reproduced, distributed, archived, or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior written consent by Aberdeen Group, Inc. (071309b)